

DOINGWHATWORKS



Presentation

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

Assigning Adult Advocates to Promote Academic and Social Success

April 2009

Topic: Dropout Prevention

Practice: Adult Advocates

Highlights

- An adult advocate meets with a student regularly to discuss their academic, social, and emotional needs. They act as a bridge between the student, family, and school.
- Struggling students who form relationships with adult advocates improve social skills and progress at a greater pace academically.
- The intensity and kind of training provided for advocates will vary based upon the severity of the student's problems.
- School administrators should facilitate regular meetings between advocates and students.

Full Transcript

Slide 1

Welcome to the overview on assigning adult advocates.

Slide 2

Jason is struggling. His grades are down. He's having problems with other students, and issues at home seem far more real and pressing than homework and exams.

His teachers know he's struggling and try to encourage him but don't have enough time to mentor him.

Jason is longing to feel accepted by peers and adults. He needs someone to talk to, but whom?

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Jason, and others like him, would benefit from the guidance and support of an adult advocate.

Slide 4

An adult advocate is someone who meets regularly with students to discuss and assist with their academic and social needs. They act as a bridge between the student and his or her parents and the school. Through this coordination and support, advocates help struggling students navigate through middle and high school.

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Advocates offer guidance for academic and behavioral improvement, direct students and families to resources, and model behaviors and practices that can help students to succeed. But more importantly, advocates create trusting and caring relationships and provide students with the emotional support they need to feel accepted and special just the way they are.

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The results of this supportive, consistent, and individualized connection are clear.

Research shows that struggling students who form relationships with adult advocates earn more credits toward graduation, have better attendance records, improve their communication and social skills, and progress academically at a greater pace than those that don't.

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Advocates can have a powerful impact on students, but where do you find them?

Slide 8

Advocates can come from outside or inside the school. Within the school, counselors, teachers, and school administrators can serve as advocates. They have the advantage of understanding the school system and being better able to negotiate adjustments with the school system to accommodate the students' needs. The intensity and kind of training they would need for their role may vary depending on the severity of the students' problems. However, because school staff may not always have the time for training and for frequent meetings with the neediest students, members of the surrounding community, trained professionals, and social workers can also be effective in this role.

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Whoever fills the role of advocate, they should have a base of operations on the school grounds, making them easily accessible and reinforcing their connection with the school.

They should also have time to spend with each student they are working with. No advocate should ever have a caseload of more than fifteen students.

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In selecting advocates, there are certain characteristics to keep in mind.

First, relevant training, cultural understanding, and experience in helping students solve similar problems are required qualifications of an advocate.

Secondly, advocates need to truly believe that all students can succeed and be willing to accept students as they are.

Also, advocates need to be able to work collaboratively. They will often need to work not only with the student but with teachers, school staff, and families as well.

Lastly, advocacy takes time under the best of circumstances, and students may be resistant to the idea of receiving aid from an adult, whether it is a mentor, monitor, counselor, or advocate. Persistence is therefore essential.

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Advocates should receive training on how to work with students, parents, and staff to address a variety of problems ranging from transportation to study skills to interactions with peers.

They should be shown how to monitor attendance and use multiple sources of data to establish realistic goals and improvement plans for their students.

Also, advocates should be aware of how to find resources to help students meet their postsecondary and career goals.

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To help students gain confidence in their ability to succeed, advocates should negotiate realistic expectations and flexible policies with school staff.

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Effective advocacy relies not only on the skills and characteristics of the advocate but on the environment created by the school itself.

Slide 14

School administrators should facilitate regular meetings between advocates and students by providing ample opportunities and sufficient time for the advocate and the student to connect. For example, administrators may reallocate daily schedules to provide a specific period for adult advocate-student meetings to occur or require meetings to occur during breaks within the school day, such as lunch or advisory periods.

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It's vital that school administrators clearly communicate the role of the advocates to instructional staff and parents, otherwise misunderstandings may arise about the role that advocates play in student life. Without clear communication and support from the administration, advocates may find their efforts blocked from within.

Slide 16

Finally, accurately identifying which students actually need intervention can greatly ease the burden on

the school's support system. Proper use of a comprehensive data system can greatly help with this, and a personalized learning environment can reduce the number of students who actually need this level of attention.

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As for Jason, he's still in school and meeting twice a week with Mr. Schirmer. They had a rocky couple of weeks, but Jason's doing better in class now and is finding some better ways to deal with issues at home and with other students at school. He doesn't feel quite so alone, and school has changed from an unwanted distraction to the place where he goes to get the help he needs.

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To learn more about assigning adult advocates to students at risk of dropping out, please explore the additional resources on the [Doing What Works website](#).